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ABSTRACT

Ways to study and evaluate different types of college environments are discussed, and sources of practical information about specific types of colleges are presented. Three main types of approaches used to measure college environments concern student behaviors (amount of time spent studying), student perceptions (the college is highly competitive), and student personal characteristics (academic ability). Examples of objective instruments that have been used to study these areas are cited. Other studies use college catalogs, directories, governmental publications, college budgets, statistical abstracts, and books. Various categories of college environments can be conceptualized using regional criteria, size criteria, and other criteria. Nine types of college environments have been suggested by Pace (1963, 1968, 1971). A map of American college communities that demonstrates clustering in various geographical environments is included. A list of categories of environmental dimensions of colleges is appended. (SW)

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COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY

A Paper Presented at the
Annual Meeting of the
Southwest Educational Research Association

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FIGURE 1: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE THREE MAIN TYPES OF APPROACHES USED BY INSTRUMENTS TO MEASURE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS 4

COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS

The meaning of "environment" and "college environment"

The Dictionary of Education (Good, 1973) offers us one definition of the term "environment." It defines it as

> ". . . a general term designating all the objects, forces, and conditions that affect the individual through such stimuli as he is able to receive" (p. 214).

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1974) defines it in similar ways as:

> "(1) the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded, (2a) the complex of climatic, edaphic, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival, and (2b) the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community" (p. 382).

A "college environment" would relate to more specific places and conditions in the world. Peterson (1974) in quoting C. Robert Pace defines a college environment as:

> ". . . the prevailing atmosphere, the social and intellectual climate, and the style of life on a campus" (p. 310).

Alexander W. Astin (1968), who was formerly the Director of the Office of Research with the American Council on Education, has stated:

> "In the broadest sense, we can define the 'college environment' as including <u>any</u> characteristic of the college that constitutes a potential stimulus for the student, i.e., that is capable of changing the student's sensory input" (p. 3).

He also mentions that the stimulus "model" is equally appliable to the environment of faculty and staff.

The term college is frequently referred to as "college organizational climate" in professional literature.

Any specific college environment is composed of many, many people, places, and things. A few would include the following: dormitories, libraries, books, professors, students, trees, lakes, climate, and soil.

<u>Studying and Measuring the College Environment</u>

College environments can be studied by both the physical and social sciences. More specific examples of academic disciplines which can be involved are as follows: Sociology, Geography, Anthropology, Political Science, and Agriculture. Even the academic areas of architecture and law (which are usually classified outside of the social and physical sciences) would be used in studying college environments. The behavioral sciences would also relate to the study.

In the last two decades, several measuring instruments have been devised to study, measure, and compare college organizational climates.

The first of these, the College Characteristic Index (CCI), was created in the late 1950's by Pace and Stern

(1958). Pace (1971) claims that creation of this index was stimulated and based on the theories of psychologist Henry Murray, who studied and wrote about personality in the 1930's. Pace explains Murran's theory of personality as follows:

> "According to his theory, individuals have characteristic needs, whose strengths and interrelationships define personality; the environment has coresponding potentials, which Murray called environmental press, for satisfying or frustrating these needs. . . According to the need-press theory, one could describe both the person and the environment in parallel terms" (p. 203).

Pace also felt that students would tend to choose those types of specific college environments which would meet their own personality needs.

Another instrument that was constructed is called the Environment Assessment Technique (EAT) which was designed by Astin and Holland (1961). EAT assumes that the college size, the average intelligence of its students, and the personal characteristics of the students determine the college environment.

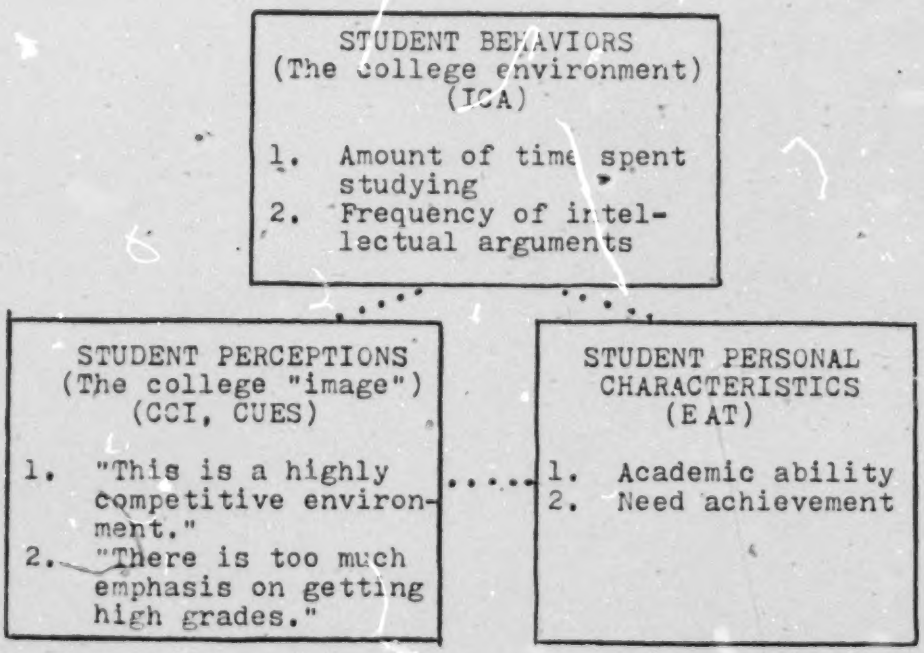
A widely used instrument is that of the College and University Environmental Scales (CUES) which was designed by Pace (1963). It includes over half of the items from the CCI. In 1969, a second edition of the CUES was published. The two editions have been given to students at hundreds of colleges and universities in America (Pace, 1971). According to Peterson (1974), this instrument

measures the "students' perception of the general social and intellectual atmosphere" (p. 310).

Astin's Inventory of College Activities (ICA) measures student reported behavior. This instrument has 400 questions in it. The student who answers questions on it is asked to report on such matters as frequency of drinking beer and frequency of biting fingernails. The entire instrument (in booklet form) is 12 pages in length (Astin, 1968).

To clarify the differences between the three main types of approaches used by instruments to measure college environments, Astin (1968, p. 9) presents a figure. It is presented (with numbered examples) in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1



The previously mentioned instruments were designed specifically to measure, study, and compare college environments. There are other objective measuring instruments that are used by researchers in their studies which are helpful in researching certain aspects of college environments. Some of these instruments include the following:

Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values

Omnibus Personality Inventory

College Student Questionnaire

These three are commonly used to study areas other than college environments, also.

Not all college environmental studies rely on objective instruments to obtain data. Some studies use college catalogs, directories, governmental publications (federal and state), college budgets, statistical abstracts and books, and various other sources.

Types of College Environments

Many studies, both formal and informal, have indicated that there are different types of college environments in the United States. Since there were 1,701 public and private institutions of higher education (four year) in Fall, 1972 (U.S. Office of Education, 1974) and 1,203 public and private junior colleges in Fall, 1974 (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1975), there are many ways to group colleges and different categories to use.

By looking at a map of college communities, one can conceptualize various categories of college environments. APPENDIX 1 presents such a map, which is an alteration of a published map (Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide, 1974, pp. 30-31). Examples of types of college environments which may be seen using this method are as follows:

Beach environments

Sun Belt region environments

New England environments

Northern (cold, snowy winter) environments

Eastern Pennsylvania environments

By superimposing other maps on top of it, one can make other categories, like the following:

Humid subtropical region environments

Rural environments

Urban environments

Mountain environments

Dry environments

These "systematic descriptive" methods of grouping colleges have been "developed and widely applied," according to Pace (1971).

Similar methods of classifying college environments are on the basis of race and sex, although race and sex barriers have been disappearing since the 1940's.

Several studies have classified college environments on the basis of size (that is, number of students). Astin (1971) reveals that environments of the larger colleges

tend to be "competitive and cold." The students tend to have little contact with each other, view the administration as being indifferent to their needs, and become more involved in campus unrest than students at the smaller colleges. Colleges with more than 20,000 would certainly fit into the "large school" category. In 1969, there were about 50 such institutions (Creager and Sell, 1969).

The students at smaller colleges tend to know each other better and on "familiar terms" with their professors (Astin, 1971). The small colleges have student enrollments in the hundreds. There were over 100 institutions with enrollments of less than 200 in 1969 (Creager and Sell, 1969).

Pace (1963, 1968, 1971, etc.) has done extensive research in the area of college environments and has classified colleges into nine fairly distinct types. He related each type to five "environmental dimensions," including the following: scholarship, awareness, community, propriety, and practicality. APPENDIX 2 presents an outline explaining what these dimensions measure and what they could relate to in specific examples.

Pace's (1963, 1968, 1971, etc.) nine types of college environments are as follows:

1. Highly selective private, nonsectarian, liberal arts colleges.
2. Highly selective public and private universities.

3. Engineering and Science colleges.

4. Strongly denominational Protestant and Catholic colleges.

5. Teacher education colleges.

6. General liberal arts colleges.

7. Private and public general universities (offering many degree programs).

8. State colleges and other universities (offering fewer degree programs than public and private general universities).

9. Junior or community colleges.

The types with high scholarship characteristics would include the highly selective private, nonsectarian, liberal arts colleges, the highly selective public and private universities, and the engineering and science colleges.

Awareness traits would rank high on the first two above.

High community characteristics are found at the strongly denominational Protestant and Catholic colleges and general liberal arts colleges.

Propriety traits rate high at strongly at the denominational Protestant and Catholic colleges, teacher education colleges, and junior colleges.

Public and private general universities, state colleges and other universities, and junior colleges each have relatively high scores or traits in the practicality environmental dimension.

Most of the nine types of college environments have certain traits which would receive low ratings. For

example, engineering and science colleges have low ratings on the following environmental dimensions: awareness, community, and propriety.

Although Pace and others have spent years in defining and studying the nine types of college environments, they are not perfect. One might question whether or not the nine types violate the principles of exclusiveness and inclusiveness. These principles are defined below:

> The principle of exclusiveness states that "no observation (or college) can be classified in more than one category." The principle of inclusiveness states that "every observation (or college) can be classified into a category" (Mendenhall, Ott, and Larson, 1974, p. 44).

An apparent violation could be, for example, a small college which has superior education and engineering schools in it. The college may not be highly selective nor properly fit into the state college and other universities category. In truth, it could fit into two categories.

As Pace states, the nine categories are "fairly distinctive" (Pace, 1971, p. 204). In his writings he does not claim that they are perfect.

Sources of "Practical Information" about Specific Colleges

Student Personnel Workers and others often need "practical information" about specific college environments to use in counseling, information dissemination, and other uses not related to formal research. For example, a college counselor may be asked questions about a particular out-of-

state college environment by a senior who is planning to go to graduate school.

Fortunately, there are publications available which present such information. A few are presented below:

1. College Blue Book (1972).
2. American Colleges and Universities (Singletary, 1968).
3. Lovejoy's College Guide (Lovejoy, 1969).
4. Several others similar to the three above.
5. Numerous U.S. Government Publications.
6. College catalogs.
7. Almanacs and encyclopedias which present statistics on college enrollments and other aspects of college environments.

Conclusion

C. Robert Pace of the University of California has made a statement which best, perhaps, summarizes the subject of college environments. It is as follows:

> ". . . To speak of the college environment is to indicate one's awareness that a college is more than books, buildings, students, professors, and classes and that four years spent at Bob Jones University may be distinctly different from four years spent at Johns Hopkins . . ." (Pace, 1971).

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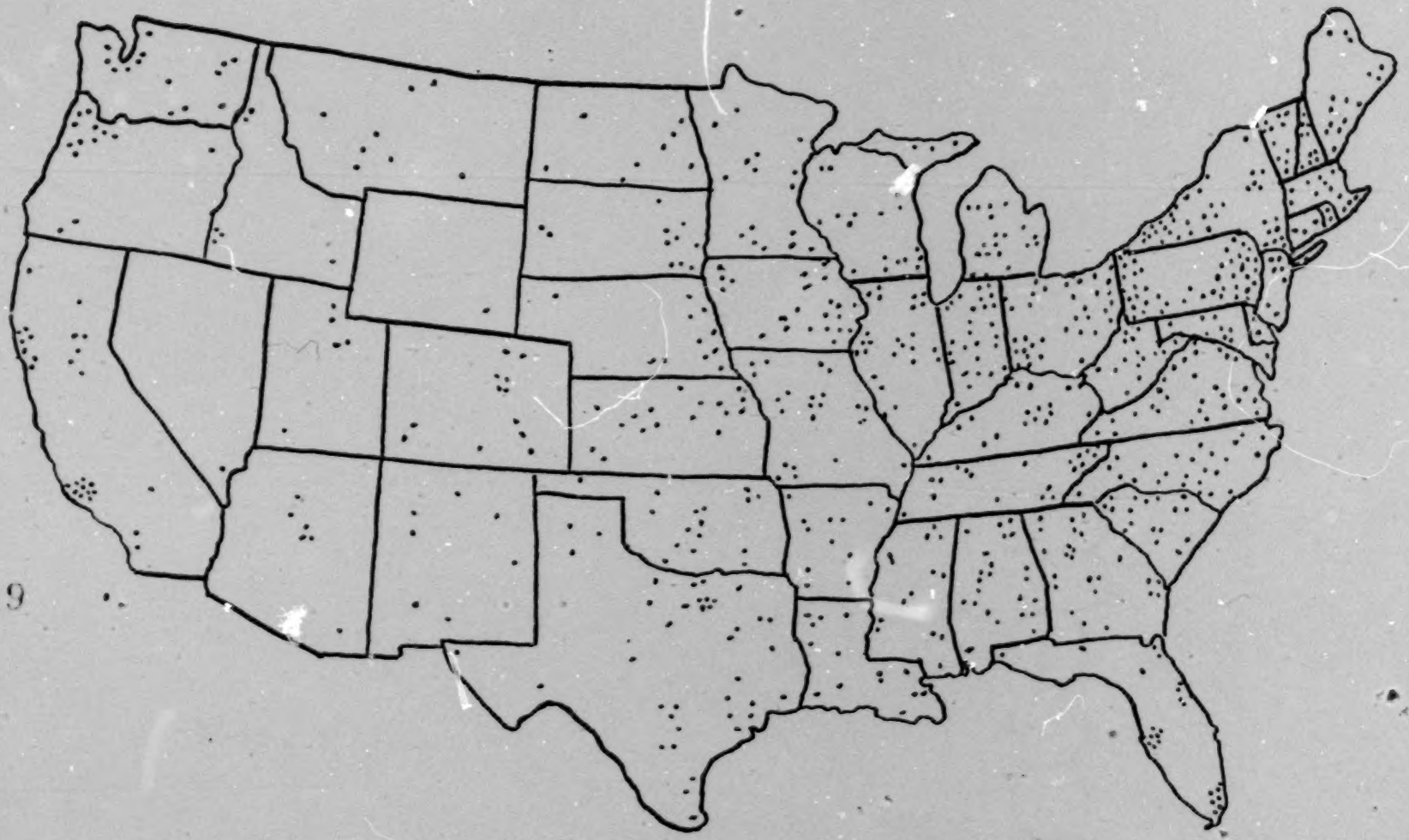
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

AMERICAN COLLEGE COMMUNITIES



APPENDIX 2

PACE'S CATEGORIES OF COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS
(an outline)

I. Scholarship Dimension

A. Measures emphasis on academic achievement and in the "interest in learning for its own sake."

B. High scholarship characteristics would involve course work that requires intensive study and the type of professors that "push" the students to their limits.

II. Awareness Dimension

A. Measures social and aesthetic sensitivity.

B. High awareness characteristics would indicate that students are very concerned with national and international affairs, poetry, music, painting, and sculpture. High awareness colleges have lecture, discussions, and concerts.

III. Community Dimension

A. Measures a "friendly, supportive, and sympathetic environment with a sense of group welfare and loyalty."

B. High community characteristics would indicate that the college is perceived as being friendly and that there are helping relationships between professors, upperclassmen, and new students.

IV. Propriety Dimension

A. Measures caution, consideration, and thoughtfullness.

B. High propriety characteristics would indicate that the students take good care of school property, that they do not attack important people in student newspapers, and that they ask for permission to deviate from rules.

V. Practicality Dimension.

1. Measures concern for personal status and practical benefits.

2. High practicality characteristics would indicate that student leaders have special privileges, that students try to be in the "right" group, and that vocational courses are valued by the students.

NOTE: This is a brief summary from several of his writings (Pace, 1963, 1969, and 1971).